
Government of the District of Columbia



TESTIMONY OF

Kerri Briggs

STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
THE HONORABLE VINCENT C. GRAY, CHAIRMAN

STATEWIDE LONGITUDINAL DATA SYSTEM

OCTOBER 23, 2009

COUNCIL CHAMBERS
JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW, ROOM 500
WASHINGTON, DC 20004

Introduction

GOOD AFTERNOON CHAIRMAN GRAY AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE. I AM KERRI BRIGGS, STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

I AM HERE TODAY TO DISCUSS THE STATEWIDE LONGITUDINAL EDUCATION DATA WAREHOUSE, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS SLED, AND ANSWER QUESTIONS REGARDING THE TERMINATION OF THE CONTRACT TO BUILD THIS DATA SYSTEM.

I WANT TO THANK MY COLLEAGUE, CHIEF PROCUREMENT OFFICER DAVID GRAGAN AND HIS STAFF AT THE OFFICE OF CONTRACTING AND PROCUREMENT (OCP), FOR ASSISTING OSSE IN THE MONITORING OF THE CONTRACT AND ULTIMATELY, TERMINATING A CONTRACT THAT WAS NOT BEING FULFILLED. MY PREPARED TESTIMONY WILL BE POSTED ON MY AGENCY'S WEBSITE AFTER THIS HEARING.

FROM MY PERSPECTIVE, THE COMMITMENT AND INTEREST OF THE MAYOR, THE CITY COUNCIL, SCHOOLS, AND COMMUNITY IN THIS PROJECT IS ENCOURAGING. WHEREAS OTHER STATE LEADERS ARE STILL WORKING TO CONVINCE THEIR COMMUNITIES WHY SUCH A PROJECT IS NEEDED, THIS CITY HAS SHOWN COMMITMENT AND INTEREST FROM THE BEGINNING. THAT'S THE GOOD NEWS.

THE NOT SO GOOD NEWS IS THE TERMINATION OF THIS CONTRACT. IT IS BOTH FRUSTRATING AND DISAPPOINTING AND I KNOW THE COUNCIL SHARES THESE SENTIMENTS.

ALONG WITH THOSE FEELINGS, THERE ARE 2 THINGS I WANT TO STRESS TODAY DURING THIS HEARING:

- THE TERMINATION OF THIS CONTRACT WAS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY AND THE RIGHT THING TO DO; AND
- I AM FULLY COMMITTED TO FIXING WHAT WE HAVE AND MOVING FORWARD IN CREATING A STATEWIDE LONGITUDINAL DATABASE THAT MEETS ALL THE NEEDS OF THE DISTRICT'S EDUCATION COMMUNITY.

FOR ME AND SO MANY OTHERS IN DC, THIS IS NOT JUST AN IT PROJECT OFF-TRACK. RATHER, IT IS AN UNFORTUNATE DELAY FOR THE DISTRICT IN DEVELOPING A CRUCIAL TOOL THAT WILL ENHANCE TEACHER PREPARATION, INFORM POLICYMAKERS, AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, HELP ALL OF US BETTER EDUCATE THE STUDENTS WE SERVE.

UPON BECOMING ACTING SUPERINTENDENT IN APRIL, I WAS INFORMED ABOUT UNMET BENCHMARKS, MISSING DELIVERABLES, AND NUMEROUS DEFICIENCIES WITH SLED. IN FACT, AS CURRENTLY CONSTRUCTED, THE DATABASE IS NOT LONGITUDINAL – SLED IS

MISSING ITS “L.” I IMMEDIATELY PRIORITIZED THE SLED PROJECT AS A CRITICAL ISSUE FOR OSSE TO ADDRESS, AND BEGAN ASSEMBLING DATA AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION.

Contract Award – July 2008 to March 2009

I BECAME STATE SUPERINTENDENT IN APRIL 2009. THE PROJECT HAD BEEN UNDERWAY, BY THIS POINT, FOR EIGHT MONTHS. I WANT TO HIGHLIGHT A FEW OF THE STEPS AND MEASURES TAKEN BY OSSE BETWEEN WHEN THE CONTRACT WAS AWARDED IN JULY 2008 AND THE ITEMS THAT WERE DUE TO BE DELIVERED TO OSSE IN FEBRUARY 2009.

THE ORIGINAL CONTRACT PLAN WAS TO DELIVER A KEY FUNCTION OF THE PROJECT WITHIN 60 DAYS OF SIGNING – THE “UNIQUE STUDENT IDENTIFIER” OR USI. THIS COMPONENT IS TO ASSIGN A UNIQUE SET OF NUMBERS TO EACH INDIVIDUAL STUDENT THAT FOLLOWS THAT STUDENT THROUGHOUT HIS OR HER EXPERIENCE IN THE DC K-12 SYSTEM. EXPECTED BY SEPTEMBER 2008, THE DELIVERABLE WAS NOT MET. IN MID-DECEMBER THE CONTRACT WAS MODIFIED AND THE DUE DATE FOR THE USI WAS MOVED TO LATE FEBRUARY 2009.

IN LARGE PART DUE TO THE DISTRICT'S OWN SUPPLEMENTAL EFFORTS, A USI STRUCTURE WAS DELIVERED AT THE END OF FEBRUARY. HOWEVER, AS INDICATED IN THE DISTRICT'S LETTER OF TERMINATION FOR DEFAULT, THE DELIVERY CONTAINED NUMEROUS DEFECTS. OSSE AND THE CONTRACTOR DEVELOPED A PLAN TO CORRECT THE PROBLEMS WITH THE UNIQUE STUDENT IDENTIFIER PRIOR TO SLED BEING USED BY LEAs FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MID-MARCH. ALTHOUGH THE SCHOOLS WERE ABLE TO ACCESS SLED FOR PURPOSES OF CHANGING DATA, THE USI MODULE WAS NOT FULLY-FUNCTIONAL ACCORDING TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE CONTRACT.

Superintendent Briggs' Arrival at OSSE

DURING MY FIRST MONTH, I WAS BEING BRIEFED ON THE DIFFICULTIES WITH THE CONTRACTOR. AFTER WHICH I HELD A MEETING WITH MY EXECUTIVE TEAM TO DISCUSS THE ISSUES AND DEVELOP A PLAN TO GET THE PROJECT BACK ON TRACK. SEVERAL PROBLEMS WERE READILY APPARENT, INCLUDING:

- IMPROPER EXECUTIVE-LEVEL PROJECT REPORTING;
- A HIGHLY DEFECTIVE SYSTEM;
- PROJECT MISMANAGEMENT; AND
- DEADLINES CONTINUOUSLY BEING MISSED.

MY BIGGEST CONCERNS REGARDING THE SLED PROJECT WERE TO MAKE SURE THAT THE DISTRICT'S LOCAL AND FEDERAL RESOURCES WERE SPENT WISELY AND MAKE CERTAIN THAT WE HAD A FUNCTIONING DATA SOLUTION FOR THE DISTRICT'S EDUCATION COMMUNITY.

I REQUESTED THAT OCTO PROVIDE ME WITH AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT. IN ADDITION, I REPLACED THE OSSE CIO WITH TOM FONTENOT. MR. FONTENOT HAS EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE WITH IT INFRASTRUCTURE, ENTERPRISE SERVER OPERATIONS, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF LARGE DATA SYSTEMS SUCH AS SLED. I TASKED MR. FONTENOT WITH MAKING SLED HIS TOP PRIORITY. HE BEGAN TO IMMEDIATELY ADDRESS DEFICIENCIES ASSOCIATED WITH SLED. AS A FIRST STEP, WE ENGAGED THE CONTRACTOR TO WORK ON FIXING THE PROBLEMS TO GET THE PROJECT ON TRACK. DURING THIS SAME TIME PERIOD, WILLIAMS, ADLEY EXPLAINED THEY WERE EXPERIENCING FUNDING PROBLEMS -- ATTRIBUTED TO THE DIFFICULTY OF MANAGING A FIRM-FIXED PRICED CONTRACT WHEN THEY HAD AGREED TO PAY THEIR SUBCONTRACTORS ON A TIME-AND-MATERIALS BASIS. AS A RESULT, THE CONTRACTOR PROPOSED TO REDUCE ITS STAFF TO MAKE UP FOR THIS. BELIEVING THAT THIS WOULD HINDER THE CONTRACTOR'S ABILITY TO DELIVER A QUALITY PROJECT ON TIME TO OSSE, STAFF FROM THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER, ALONG WITH OCP AND THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL MET WITH THE CONTRACTOR IN MID-APRIL TO DISSUADE THE CONTRACTOR FROM WITHDRAWING RESOURCES. TO THAT END, OSSE AND OCP HAD SEVERAL MEETINGS WITH WA THROUGHOUT APRIL AND MAY TO RESOLVE THE ISSUES.

DESPITE THESE EFFORTS, THE CONTRACTOR DID NOT CORRECT THE DEFICIENCIES IN THE SYSTEM. REALIZING THAT THE PROJECT WAS SIGNIFICANTLY OFF TRACK, OSSE REQUESTED THAT OCP ISSUE A *Cure Notice* TO THE CONTRACTOR, WHICH WAS DELIVERED ON JUNE 17, 2009. THIS IS THE FORMAL STEP IN THE CONTRACTING PROCESS TO GET A PROJECT BACK ON TRACK.

ALTHOUGH THE CONTRACTOR RESPONDED ON PAPER, THE IDENTIFIED DEFICIENCIES WERE NOT FIXED. AT THE END OF THE DAY, THE OCP CONTRACTING OFFICER REVIEWED THE EVIDENCE AND CONCLUDED THAT THIS CONTRACT SHOULD BE TERMINATED FOR DEFAULT.

OCP ISSUED A *Termination for Default* ON SEPTEMBER 9, 2009. IT IS OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT THE CONTRACTOR IS CONSIDERING LITIGATION, WHICH MEANS THAT OUR ABILITY TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS TODAY WILL BE LIMITED TO DOCUMENTS THAT ARE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE AS WE SEEK TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT THE DISTRICT'S INTEREST IN THIS PROCESS. YOU SHOULD ALSO KNOW THAT WE ARE CONSIDERING SIMILAR LEGAL ACTION. WE ARE COMMITTED TO RECOVERING FROM THE CONTRACTOR EVERY DOLLAR THAT MAY HAVE BEEN WASTED ON THIS PROJECT.

WHILE THESE LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS UNFOLD, I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT OSSE HAS NOT STOOD STILL. WE HAVE TAKEN A NUMBER OF STEPS TO IMPROVE THE SLED PROJECT FOUR OF WHICH I WILL HIGHLIGHT TODAY.

FIRST, OSSE RECENTLY CONTRACTED AN INDEPENDENT, THIRD PARTY TO CONDUCT A FULL ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PROJECT. I'M PLEASED TO REPORT THAT, STARTING LAST WEEK, GARTNER IS CONDUCTING AN EXHAUSTIVE ASSESSMENT OF SLED. GARTNER IS A WELL-RESPECTED IT RESEARCH, ANALYSIS AND CONSULTING FIRM. IT WILL:

- A. PERFORM A TOP-DOWN INDEPENDENT AUDIT OF SLED TECHNOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURE;
- B. IDENTIFY THE QUALITY OF THE EXISTING SLED SYSTEM;
- C. ANALYZE THE WA AND OSSE SIGNED TECHNICAL DESIGN DOCUMENT AND DETERMINE IF THE APPLICATION MEETS THE REQUIREMENTS;
- D. IDENTIFY HOW THE ARCHITECTURE COMPARES TO OTHER AVAILABLE MARKET SOLUTIONS;
- E. DETERMINE IF THERE IS A MORE COST EFFECTIVE SOLUTION OR APPROACH; AND
- F. IDENTIFY VIABLE OPTIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD.

WE EXPECT TO RECEIVE THE COMPLETED GARTNER AUDIT BY THE END OF DECEMBER. ONCE RECEIVED, WE WILL USE THIS AUDIT TO DEVELOP A PLAN TO RE-LAUNCH AN IMPROVED SLED, WHILE RE-ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS.

TO MAKE CLEAR, BY DOING THIS WORK, GARTNER IS REMOVING ITSELF FROM CONSIDERATION OF A NEW CONTRACT TO DEVELOP SLED SHOULD ONE BE NECESSARY.

SECOND, FOLLOWING THE TERMINATION OF THE CONTRACT, WE HAVE RELOCATED THE SLED HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE TO THE DC GOVERNMENT DATA CENTER SO THAT WE CAN CONTINUE TO WORK ON SLED AND PERMIT IT TO ACCEPT 2009-2010 STUDENT DATA.

THIRD, OSSE HAS ALSO IMPLEMENTED A PLAN TO IMPROVE OUR COMMUNICATION, TRAINING AND OUTREACH TO LEAS AND THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY. FURTHERMORE, OSSE IS IMPROVING OUR DATA GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY. THE GOAL IS TO CREATE A BETTER PROCESS FOR RESOLVING EDUCATION DATA CHALLENGES BY INCREASING COMMUNICATION WITHIN OSSE AND WITH LEAS AND STAKEHOLDERS AND ALLOWING GREATER INPUT BY LEAS INTO POLICY DECISIONS.

FINALLY, WHILE SLED IS IN DEVELOPMENT MODE, WE HAVE CREATED AN INTERIM TOOL TO COLLECT AND REPORT ON FEDERAL DATA ELEMENTS. THIS TOOL ALLOWS US TO COLLECT DATA, BUT IS NOT THE LONGITUDINAL DATA SYSTEM WE ARE ALL WORKING TOWARDS.

WHILE WE HAVE MADE SOME POSITIVE STRIDES FORWARD, THE DATABASE PRODUCED BY WILLIAMS, ADLEY FALLS WELL SHORT OF WHAT WAS REQUIRED IN THE CONTRACT.

Future Steps to Ensure the Success of SLED

I WANT TO CLOSE BY HIGHLIGHTING A CRITICAL CHANGE ON IMPROVING COMMUNICATION REGARDING POLICIES, STANDARDS, ARCHITECTURE, DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURE, AND ISSUE-RESOLUTION PROCESSES. WE HAVE CREATED SEVERAL COMMUNICATION MECHANISMS THAT WILL ASSIST WITH THIS EFFORT:

- DATA QUALITY COALITION,

- SLED WORKING GROUP, AND
- DATA STEWARDS.

THE SLED DATA QUALITY COALITION CONSISTS OF THE PRINCIPAL LEADERS OF THE DISTRICT'S EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES— SUCH AS MYSELF, CHANCELLOR RHEE, AND JO BAKER OF THE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD. THESE LEADERS WILL MEET ON A REGULAR BASIS TO ENSURE THE EFFICIENT AND ACCURATE COLLECTION, MANAGEMENT, SUPPORT, AND REPORTING OF INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL-LEVEL DATA. AT THESE MEETINGS, WE WILL DISCUSS POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO THE DATA NEEDS OF AGENCIES THROUGHOUT THE CITY. THE FIRST MEETING OF THIS GROUP IS PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH.

A SECOND MECHANISM FOR IMPROVED ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMMUNICATION IS THE SLED WORKING GROUP. THIS GROUP IS COMPRISED OF THE SLED PROJECT STAFF AND DATA MANAGERS FROM OSSE, DCPS, THE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD, AND OTHER STAFF. THE SLED WORKING GROUP WILL:

- OVERSEE THE MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SLED;
- RESOLVE DATA AND PROCESS ISSUES REFERRED BY THE END USERS; AND
- OVERSEE THE SCOPE AND GROWTH OF SLED.

A THIRD MECHANISM FOR IMPROVED ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ARE OSSE'S DATA STEWARDS. THESE EMPLOYEES ARE PROGRAM AREA SPECIALISTS WITH DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING RESPONSIBILITIES. THEY DETERMINE WHAT DATA THE OSSE SHOULD BE COLLECTING AND HOW BEST TO COLLECT AND REPORT IT. THEY ALSO MONITOR DATA QUALITY AND IDENTIFY WAYS TO IMPROVE IT. SOME STEWARDS ARE ALSO TASKED WITH WORKING DIRECTLY WITH LEAS TO PROVIDE THEM A FAMILIAR POINT OF CONTACT FOR DATA WITHIN OSSE.

IN ADDITION, WE WILL SET UP REGULAR BRIEFINGS FOR THE WIDER EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY. THESE INDIVIDUALS WILL CONSIST OF REPRESENTATIVES OF PARTICIPATING AGENCIES THAT ARE MAJOR EDUCATION DATA PRODUCERS AND USERS, INCLUDING CITY COUNCIL, DCPS, PCSB, SBOE, OTHER DC AGENCIES, SCHOOLS, UDC, MAYOR'S OFFICE, NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS, EDUCATION RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS, EARLY CHILDHOOD AND POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS, AND WORKFORCE READINESS AND ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS. THEY WILL BE BRIEFED BY OSSE ON THE STATUS OF SLED AND WILL BE ASKED TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK AND INPUT. AT OUR FIRST BRIEFING, I WILL PRESENT ON THE FINDINGS OF THE GARTNER AUDIT AND DISCUSS OUR PLANS FOR MOVING FORWARD TO DEVELOP THIS DATABASE.

FINALLY, WE WILL INCLUDE UPDATES ON SLED IN OUR REGULAR OSSE NEWSLETTER TO LEAS, SCHOOLS, AND INTERESTED PARTIES. IT'S BEEN SAID – TRUST, BUT VERIFY. I SUSPECT YOU BRING THAT SAME LEVEL OF SKEPTICISM TO THIS HEARING TODAY. I HOPE

THAT THE STEPS I'VE JUST OUTLINED PROVIDE ASSURANCES AS TO HOW WE WILL IMPROVE TRANSPARENCY AND PROVIDE ADDITIONAL DATA.

WHILE THE SITUATION THAT LED US HERE IS UNFORTUNATE AND A SET-BACK, IT ALSO REAFFIRMS OUR COMMITMENT TO HAVING A STRONG EDUCATIONAL DATA SYSTEM IN DC THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS, TEACHERS, SCHOOLS, AND THE PUBLIC. THIS CONCLUDES MY TESTIMONY. I WILL BE HAPPY TO ANSWER QUESTIONS FROM THE COMMITTEE.